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SUBJECT: POST NOMINATION FOR THE 2009 "WOMAN OF COURAGE AWARD"

#### 11. NOMINATION

In accordance with a call for nominations for the Secretary of State's 2009 Award for International Women of Courage, post nominates Veronika Marchenko, head of the "Mother's Right" Foundation, for her exceptional dedication to exposing human rights abuses in the armed forces.

#### 12. BIODATA

Name: Marchenko, Veronika Aleksandrovna  
Job Title/Association: Chair of the Board, Interregional Public Charity Foundation "Mother's Right"  
Date of Birth: November 27, 1969  
Country of Birth: Russia  
Citizenship: Russian  
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#### 13. JUSTIFICATION

Veronika Marchenko has been the chair of the board of the "Mother's Right" Foundation since its inception in 1990. The mission of this uniquely-positioned NGO is to expose the true circumstances surrounding peacetime deaths in the army, provide moral and legal support to surviving families, and lobby for better conditions in an armed forces ravaged by hazing and corruption.

Despite hurdles to ascertaining information about the deaths, despite opposition by the military, the "Mother's Right" Foundation has drawn major successes in defending rights of bereaved families in court. In 2007 alone, lawyers of Mother's Right participated in 132 litigations free of charge (pro bono) in 21 cities across Russia, in which parents of victims acted as claimants. In 2007, the foundation assisted 5,323 families of servicemen who died during (peacetime / non-combat) military service.

According to Ms. Marchenko, the Russian Defense Ministry purposely underestimates its official death statistics with an annual death toll of about 1,000 people. The number is three times as high, Ms. Marchenko has repeatedly stressed. The most common reasons for these deaths are beatings and harassment leading to suicide, intolerable living conditions, denial of needed medical assistance and excessive labor.

One of the most appalling issues relating to military deaths is the cause of death given by authorities. About 35 percent of the parents seeking guidance at Ms. Marchenko's Foundation said that their sons had committed suicide and hence, parents experienced difficulties in acquiring entitlements due to the surviving family. In many cases, lawyers of the Mother's Right foundation investigating the circumstances of death consistently proved that the reason for a conscript's death was not suicide, but provocation to a suicide or murder.

In the course of complicated litigation in 2007-08, Ms. Marchenko's foundation won an uphill battle against the Presidential Regiment, an elite military unit, where a conscript was driven to a suicide by bullying. An unprecedented decision against top brass gives hope to other families finding themselves in a similar situation.

Ms. Marchenko's efforts to make military leadership accountable for

peacetime deaths have not been recognized by the host government. As one of the few whistleblowers shedding light on human rights abuses in the army, she and her foundation have experienced pressure from authorities

In 1990, in a small room in downtown Moscow, with one table, one chair and a telephone, young Veronika Marchenko started the "Mother's Right" Foundation, while still a student at Moscow University. Her first articles on hazing in the then-Soviet armed forces generated an immense response from citizens and harsh criticism by authorities. Pioneering in the investigation of military-related deaths, she soon became the center of an initiative group of parents whose sons were killed during (peacetime/non-combat) military service. Today the "Mother's Right" Foundation has become an outstanding example of a successful grass-roots endeavor, which started from scratch and evolved into an influential citizens' group owing to the support of ordinary citizens.

#### 14. NOTIFICATION

Ms. Marchenko was notified of the nomination. She confirmed her willingness to accept such an award and availability to travel to Washington in March 2009.

BEYRLE